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2002HANOI00791 - CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	VCE-00	M-00
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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6061
INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY
USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000791

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP A/S KELLY FROM AMBASSADOR BURGHARDT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2012

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [CB](#) [VN](#) [ETMIN](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)

SUBJECT: VISIT TO MONTAGNARD RETURNEES: THE OLD
PROBLEMS REMAIN - LAND AND RELIGION

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RAYMOND F. BURGHARDT;
REASON 1.5(D)

[1](#)1. (C) DURING A VISIT TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS
MARCH 30 - APRIL 3, I MET WITH MANY WHO HAD
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RETURNED FROM REFUGEE CAMPS IN CAMBODIA, BOTH UNDER
UNHCR AUSPICES AND "SPONTANEOUSLY." AT THE TWO
VILLAGES IN GIA LAI AND KONTUM PROVINCES WHICH CG
YAMAUCHI AND I VISITED, WE ALSO TALKED WITH FAMILY
MEMBERS OF PEOPLE STILL IN CAMBODIA. ALTHOUGH GVN
MINDERS WERE PRESENT DURING MOST OF THESE
CONVERSATIONS, PEOPLE SPOKE WITH REMARKABLE
FRANKNESS OF THE GRIEVANCES WHICH HAD DRIVEN THEM
TO EXILE AND WHICH PERSIST AFTER THEIR RETURN.
THEIR GRIEVANCES ALWAYS INVOLVED TWO ISSUES: LAND
AND RELIGION. NO ONE GAVE US THE GVN LINE: THAT
THEY HAD BEEN INCITED TO LEAVE BY "BAD PEOPLE."

[1](#)2. (C) THE RETURNEES, OFTEN SUPPORTED BY FRIENDS
SEATED NEARBY, TOLD US ABOUT COMMUNAL LAND FARMED
BY THEIR FOREBEARS WHICH HAD BEEN LOST TO A LARGE
DAM PROJECT IN GIA LAI PROVINCE, TO A "NEW ECONOMIC
ZONE" IN KONTUM, OR TO THE IMMENSE NEW COFFEE
PLANTATIONS BEING DEVELOPED THROUGHOUT THIS REGION.
SOME SAID THEY HAD RECEIVED NO COMPENSATION; OTHERS
TOLD OF GETTING STEEP, ROCKY LAND TO REPLACE GOOD
FIELDS. AT ONE POINT IN KONTUM, SEATED ON THE
FLOOR OF THE VILLAGE COMMUNAL HOUSE IN IA SIA WITH
SOME OF THE 15 WHOM THE UNHCR HAD REPATRIATED, AN
ETHNIC VIETNAMESE COMMUNE LEADER TRIED TO DISPUTE
ONE RETURNEE'S ACCOUNT OF HOW HIS FAMILY HAD LOST
ITS LAND. THE RETURNEE, THE MOST ARTICULATE AND
IMPASSIONED WHOM WE MET, ANGRILY RETORTED, "STOP
TELLING LIES! WE DON'T HAVE ANY LAND!"

[1](#)3. (C) THE RELIGIOUS PROBLEM IS MORE COMPLICATED
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BUT STILL REAL. IN GIA LAI WE WERE ABLE TO MEET
PRIVATELY WITH A WOMAN WHO TEARFULLY TOLD US THAT
HER HUSBAND WAS A PROTESTANT "PREACHER" WHO HAD
BEEN ARRESTED FOR A WEEK AND BEATEN. HE RAN AWAY
TO CAMBODIA LAST FALL, JUST AFTER HE WAS RELEASED.
WITH VIETNAMESE REPORTERS OUTSIDE SCREAMING AT GVN
OFFICIALS TO "BREAK DOWN THE DOOR AND GET IN
THERE," THE WOMAN SAID, IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION,
THAT IT WAS NOT SAFE FOR HER HUSBAND TO RETURN.
OTHERS GAVE VAGUER ACCOUNTS OF PERSECUTION. IN
BOTH VILLAGES WE VISITED, PEOPLE TOLD US THAT
ALTHOUGH EVERYONE IN THE VILLAGE WAS "PROTESTANT"
(MEANING PROTESTANT BUT NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE
GOVERNMENT AUTHORIZED CHURCH ORGANIZATION), THERE
WAS NO CHURCH AND PEOPLE WERE NOT ALLOWED TO GATHER
TO WORSHIP. THE VILLAGERS IN KONTUM KNEW THAT THE
DAY OF OUR VISIT WAS EASTER SUNDAY, BUT SAID THERE

WOULD BE NO SERVICE THERE. NEITHER VILLAGE HAD ANY CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS LAST YEAR. THEY SAID THE LAST CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION HAD BEEN "MANY YEARS AGO." PEOPLE DID SAY THEY COULD WORSHIP IN THEIR HOMES. WE NOTED THAT THESE PROBLEMS DO NOT APPLY TO MONTAGNARD CATHOLICS. AT LEAST 5,000 WERE AT THE EASTER MASS WE ATTENDED AT THE CATHEDRAL IN KONTUM.

14. (C) THE RETURNEES CAME BACK BECAUSE THEY WERE ILL, FOUND CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS DIFFICULT, OR MISSED THEIR FAMILIES. THEY DID NOT SEEM HAPPY TO BE BACK. SOME TOLD US OF DISCRIMINATION BY VILLAGE LEADERS. NO ONE HAD RECEIVED ANY ASSISTANCE FROM
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THE GOVERNMENT. EVEN SOME WHO WERE ILL HAD NOT BEEN SEEN BY A NURSE OR DOCTOR. WHEN CONSUL GENERAL YAMAUCHI VISITED SOME OF THE KONTUM RETURNEES A MONTH EARLIER, THEY HAD SEEMED MORE CONTENT, CERTAINLY MORE RESTRAINED IN FRONT OF OFFICIALS. NOW WE FOUND BITTERNESS IN BOTH VILLAGES. WE CONCLUDED THAT THE WARMTH OF RETURN HAD WORN OFF AND NOW THESE PEOPLE WERE CONFRONTING THE FACT THAT THE ORIGINAL CONDITIONS WHICH DROVE THEM TO EXILE HAD NOT CHANGED. THEY HAD LOST THEIR FEAR TO TALK. ONE RETURNEE TOLD US THAT HE DID NOT EXPECT HIS SON TO RETURN. SEVERAL SAID THAT THEY DID NOT EXPECT MANY MORE PEOPLE TO COME BACK. NO ONE SAID THOSE STILL IN CAMBODIA SHOULD RETURN.

15. (C) AS WE WERE LEAVING THE VILLAGE IN KONTUM, TWO MEN, ONE A UNHCR AND THE OTHER A "SPONTANEOUS" RETURNEE, PRIVATELY URGED ME TO ENCOURAGE THE UNHCR TO VISIT THE VILLAGE "SOON AND OFTEN." EACH GAVE ME LETTERS ADDRESSED TO THE UNHCR WHICH DESCRIBED IN GENERAL TERMS THE RETURNEES' SENSE OF "INSECURITY" AND STRESSED THE NEED FOR CONTINUED

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 HANOI 000791

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP A/S KELLY FROM AMBASSADOR BURGHARDT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2012
UNHCR MONITORING. I WILL GIVE THE LETTERS TO UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE ASSADI IN BANGKOK THIS FRIDAY.

16. (C) THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMEN AND VICE
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CHAIRMEN IN GIA LAI, KONTUM, AND DAKLAK HAD THEIR EXPLANATIONS TO DISMISS MOST OF THE MONTAGNARDS' GRIEVANCES. THE KONTUM VICE CHAIRMAN, A REFRESHINGLY EARNEST FELLOW, ACTUALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE IA SIA VILLAGERS HAD NOT YET BEEN COMPENSATED FOR THE LAND LOST TWO YEARS EARLIER TO THE GIA LY DAM, A DELAY WHICH HE CLEARLY FELT WAS REGRETTABLE AND INEXCUSABLE. THIS CANDOR WAS UNIQUE. OTHERS FLATLY DENIED ANY MONTAGNARDS HAD LOST LAND TO DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS; SAID THE MONTAGNARDS WERE LAZY, IGNORANT, AND TENDED TO WHINE; OR POINTED OUT (PROBABLY CORRECTLY) THAT THINGS ALWAYS LOOKED GRIM IN THE SPRING, WITH THE LAST HARVEST EATEN AND THE NEXT ONE ABOUT TO BE PLANTED.

17. (C) THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE GOT WEAKER WHEN WE TURNED TO RELIGION. THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM (CPV) ADDRESSES THE SUBJECT WITH PERFECT CIRCULAR REASONING WHICH MAKES ANY DISCUSSION LARGELY POINTLESS: RELIGIONS HAVE TO BE RECOGNIZED BY THE

FATHERLAND FRONT; IF A PREACHER IS NOT RECOGNIZED BY ONE OF THE OFFICIALLY-RECOGNIZED CHURCHES, THEN HE IS NOT ALLOWED TO PREACH; IF AN UNAUTHORIZED PREACHER PREACHES AT A HOUSE CHURCH MEETING, THE MEETING IS ILLEGAL, ETC., ETC. ANY QUESTION WE HAVE NEVER GETS OUT OF THIS SELF-CONTAINED SYSTEM OF LENINIST LOGICAL. AS I COMMENTED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF DAKLAK, "IT SOUNDS AS IF THE PROBLEM WILL CONTINUE."

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18. (C) THE CONCLUSIONS I DRAW FROM THIS BRIEF TRIP ARE:

-- THERE ARE REAL PROBLEMS IN THE HIGHLANDS RELATED TO LAND AND RELIGION. THESE PEOPLE ARE VERY POOR -- EDUCATION LEVELS, HEALTH CONDITIONS, ETC., ARE LOW. THE OFFICIALS ARE UNDOUBTEDLY CORRECT THAT CONDITIONS ARE MUCH BETTER NOW THAN THEY WERE TWENTY YEARS AGO -- ELECTRIFICATION, SOME EDUCATION, EVEN ADVANCED EDUCATION FOR THE LUCKY FEW, SOME HEALTH CARE, ETC. SOME OFFICIALS SEEMED GENUINELY TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT EQUITY FOR THE MONTAGNARDS. BUT EVERYONE KNOWS -- EVEN GVN OFFICIALS -- THAT PEOPLE BEGIN TO EXPRESS DISCONTENT WHEN THEY RISE ABOVE THE LOWEST LEVEL OF SUBSISTENCE. THOSE WHO PROTESTED TO US THE MOST ARTICULATELY WERE PREDICTABLY THOSE WITH THE MOST YEARS OF SCHOOLING.

-- THERE PROBABLY WILL BE NEW INCIDENTS OF MONTAGNARDS TRYING TO FLEE TO CAMBODIA. WHETHER THEY GET ACROSS THE BORDER WILL DEPEND ON THE VIGILANCE OF VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIAN BORDER GUARDS.

-- THE UNHCR MUST VISIT THE RETURNEES, AS THE TWO MEN TOLD ME, "SOON AND OFTEN." THEY SHOULD VISIT THE "SPONTANEOUS" RETURNEES AS WELL AS THE 15 WHO CAME BACK UNDER UNHCR AUSPICES AS WELL AS ANY REPATRIATED IN THE FUTURE. NEGOTIATING UNHCR ACCESS TO THE "SPONTANEOUS" RETURNEES WILL BE

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DIFFICULT.

-- WE CAN LEARN THINGS FROM OUR OWN VISITS TO THE AREA, DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF GVN MINDERS. VISITING RETURNEES ACTUALLY PROVIDES AN EXCELLENT EXCUSE FOR A DEGREE OF ACCESS WHICH OTHERWISE MIGHT BE IMPOSSIBLE.

-- U.S. OFFICIAL AND NGO AID ACTIVITIES IN THE HIGHLANDS WOULD BE WELCOMED, MIGHT ALLEVIATE SOME OF THE MONTAGNARDS MARGINALIZATION, AND WOULD WIN THE GOODWILL NEEDED FOR CONTINUED ACCESS.

-- THE PEOPLE WE MET COMMUNICATED A GREAT DEAL WHICH CANNOT BE TRANSCRIBED. THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXCEPTIONAL SKILL AT NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION. THEY TALK WITH THEIR EYES. THEY WERE DEEPLY GRATEFUL THAT WE HAD VISITED.

BURGHARDT

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